



Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests



Middle Fork of the Clearwater, Lower Lochsa, and Lower Selway Place Names

(and a few other facts)

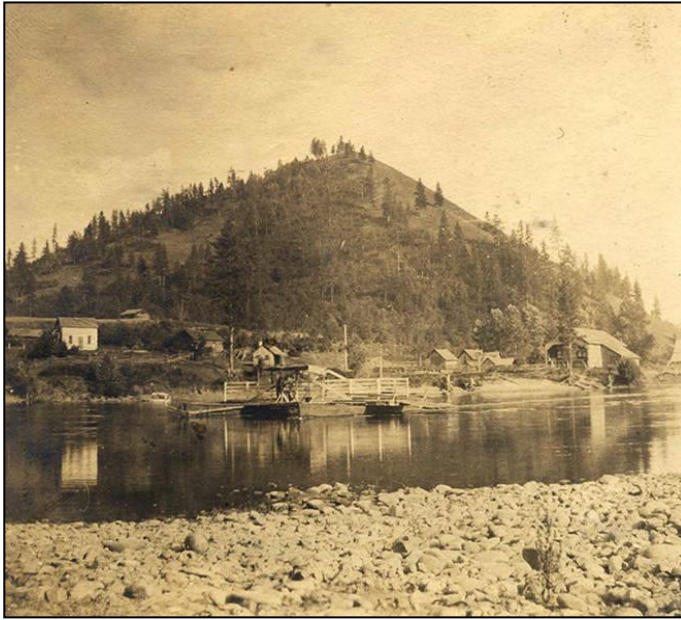
Neal Parsell



Middle Fork of the Clearwater from Mt. Stuart
Marci Nielsen-Gerhardt photograph

April 2016

This is a capsule history and is far from exhaustive. For more information and a bibliography, see my Major Fenn's Country (1990) and my notes and comments on Early Settlers Along the Middle Fork of the Clearwater River by Johnston and McLean (2006, with 2016 addendum). Both are available at the Kooskia Library and at Prairie-River Library District Headquarters at Lapwai; and Major Fenn's Country can be found on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests web site.

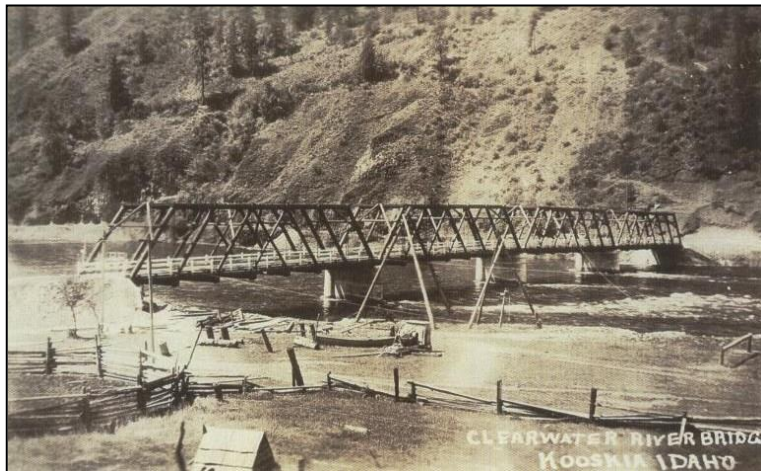


Mount Stuart is in the background of this photo taken at Kooskia in 1902. Stonebraker Collection, University of Idaho Digital Library.

Mount Stuart is the mountain that separates east and west Kooskia. The town, established in late 1895, was known as Stuart until the name was changed at the insistence of the railroad. James Stuart was part white and part Nez Perce, and was a prominent early citizen. Both Forest Service and USGS maps currently misspell the name of the mountain as “Stewart”.

East Kooskia Bridge & Toll Road

This bridge, the first across the Middle Fork, was completed in 1919. Part of the rigging for the ferry it replaced is in the foreground. The bridge gave way under heavy traffic during the 1934 Pete King forest fire and had to be shored up from below. It was replaced the next year, but the east abutment and three piers of the original bridge were re-used. The curved portion was added then. The road from the western end of the bridge to Clear Creek was built as a toll road by the Clear Creek Development Co. in 1903. Idaho County took it over in 1907. The original road didn't look much like it does now—it was extensively widened and straightened shortly after World War II.



East Kooskia Bridge, USFS Collection

Maggie Creek and Maggie's Bend—Maggie (Hill) Jackson was part Nez Perce and part Delaware Indian. A widow, she lived with her two children at the mouth of the creek for a few years prior to 1902. Some of her relatives were around longer: Tom Hill and his brother John were well known. The Hill allotment at the mouth of the creek is still in tribal ownership.

Tom Hill

Tom Hill's grave is in the small cemetery near the mouth of Maggie Creek. His father, also known as Tom Hill, was a Delaware Indian who came west in the early 1830s, became a trapper with Kit Carson and Joe Meek, and



Tom Hill's grave marker

about 1839 married a Nez Perce girl. After some colorful adventures in California in 1846 and 1847, he eventually settled on the Delaware Reservation in Kansas. The younger Tom Hill also spent some time in Kansas, but in about 1867 moved to the northwest. When the Nez Perce War broke out in 1877, he joined those Nez Perces who were attempting to get to Canada through Montana. He could speak, read, and write English, and was an interpreter for General (then Colonel) Miles and Chief Joseph in the last stages of that conflict. By 1885 Hill was a police captain on the Nez Perce reservation. He moved permanently to Maggie Creek about 1903.

Penny Bluffs or Penny Cliffs as they were later known, were named for Ben Penney (that's the way he spelled it), who settled on the river bar upstream from the bluffs in the 1870s. He and his Nez Perce wife had a son and three daughters. Penney died in 1894. His widow Elizabeth patented their place as a homestead in 1908.

Happy Jack Ford—In the days before roads and bridges, travelers had to cross rivers where they were wide and not too deep, such as the Middle Fork between the first two present cable trams. This ford was used by Nez Perces for centuries and by the early settlers as well. Happy Jack was John Evans, who was born in England and was so called because of his ability to see the gloomy side of almost everything. He patented the land between the trams on what is now the highway side of the river in 1892. Kooskia (Stuart) did not then exist.

Suttler Creek was named for Charlie Suttler, an early settler who left the Middle Fork in 1889. Little is known about him except that he had a Nez Perce wife, built a cabin with whipsawed floors, and was on his place below Suttler Creek long enough to leave a bearing orchard.

The Smallest Homestead

Most homesteads on the Middle Fork were about 160 acres, the legal maximum, but this one, at 13.6 acres, was the striking exception. It's the little flat across the river from Suttler Creek. Not big enough for a self-sustaining farm, as the Homestead Act intended, this homestead was actually part of a timber operation. R. R. Woods, a Kooskia businessman, bought up



Homestead across from Suttler Creek
Nick Gerhardt photograph

some 360 acres of public domain land in the vicinity between 1904 and 1907 and had them logged for cordwood and railroad ties. The timber was floated downstream to Kooskia, and the railroad.

Kooskia Post Office, established in 1890, preceded the town by five years. It was located on the Turner (formerly Suttler) place on the Middle Fork, and the name was contrived by Frank and Ella Turner from the “Koos-koos-kee” of the Lewis and Clark Journals. The town changed its post office name from Stuart to Kooskia in 1902. The upriver post office was moved and became Lorena.

Wilson Creek is at the upper end of the 155-acre place Billy Wilson settled on in 1885 and patented in 1895. His Nez Perce wife was Sally Ann, the same Sally Ann the creek on the South Fork is named for. Wilson had a son, Howard Wilson. Sally Ann was not Howard’s mother, but she raised him. Howard Wilson’s origins were the subject of local gossip and speculation for many years.

Ought Seven--In Nineteen Ought Seven (1907), William E. (Billy) Parry occupied and filed on an unpatented homestead at the upper end of this river bar and took over a patented homestead (the McLean place) at the lower end of the bar. He soon added 160 acres through a cash purchase from the government, and called the whole place the “Ought Seven Ranch”. For a few years, Parry ran pack strings out of here to supply railroad surveyors on the Lochsa.

Tinker Creek and Little Tinker Creek, across the river from the highway at the last cable tram, were named for George S. Tinker. Like many other homesteads along the river, this one had previous residents, but Tinker patented 155 acres there in 1907.

Swan Creek—George Swan, born in Ireland, came to the Middle Fork at about the same time as Ben Penney, in the 1870s. They had known each other before that: both served at Ft. Lapwai with the Oregon Cavalry during the Civil War. Swan’s homestead was between the Happy Jack and Suttler places. He died in 1916, having outlived both a Nez Perce wife and a daughter.

Number One Creek is across the Middle Fork from the site of Bitterroot Forest Reserve Cabin No. 1, built in 1904-1905 on the small flat where U.S. Highway 12 now intersects with the Smith Creek road. The site was later



expanded into a full-fledged ranger station and distribution center, but it declined in importance after the road reached Pete King in 1920 and O'Hara Bar in 1924. Little evidence that it ever existed now remains.

Number One Ranger Station
1910—CH Shattuck Collection
University of Idaho Digital Library

Syringa—A post office was established here in 1896 and given this name. Mary (Mrs. B. B.) Stuart, mother of the homesteader of record, was the postmaster.

Smith Creek and Little Smith Creek—A man named Smith and his crew cut cedar in this vicinity in the 1880s (maybe earlier) and floated it to Lewiston

Three Devils Creek and Picnic Area—The three devils were three boulders in the Middle Fork which interfered with pole drives. Along with other similar impediments, they were eventually dynamited out of the river.

Decker Creek is across the river from Wild Goose Campground. The Deckers were packers out of Kooskia who helped develop and market the Decker pack saddle. Unfortunately, the man who developed the tree for this widely-used pack saddle and manufactured them for many years, Oliver Pleasant (O.P.) Robinett, never had his name bestowed on any topographic features.



John Decker loading a cast iron stove on a mule.
USFS Collection

Oliver P. Robinett—creator of the Decker Pack Saddle tree.
Emmett Rynearson photograph, USFS Collection



State Land

When Idaho became a state in 1890, it was allowed to pick acreages from the Federal public domain to support various institutions. In 1896, Idaho selected 431 acres near the confluence of the Lochsa and Selway to help support a normal (teacher training) school. This selection included all the land shown in the photo. The State sold the present site of Three Rivers Motel to Chancey (Chan) Wallace, postmaster at Nezperce at the time, in 1912. Wallace later built a house on the property and lived there.



Three Rivers
Nick Gerhardt photograph

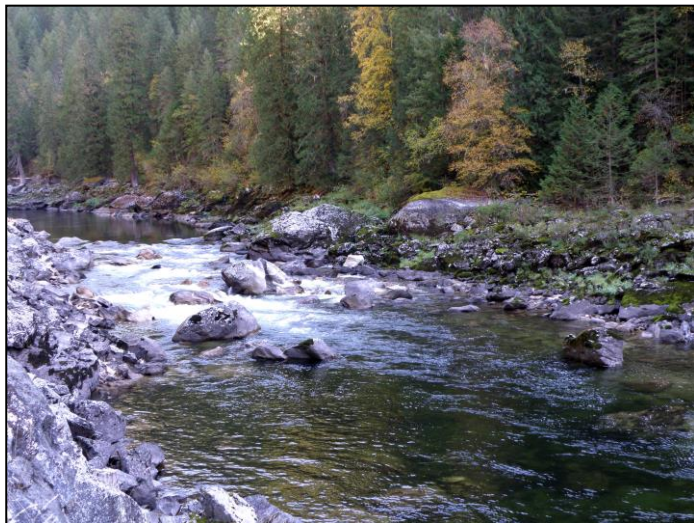
Lowell--Henry Lowell is the homesteader of record, although he wasn't the first or the only resident. From about 1902 until the Forest Homestead Act became law in 1906, Lowell occupied the place as a "way station" under permit from the Federal government. After many bureaucratic gyrations, a



1910—Lowell Post Office
C.H. Shattuck photograph
University of Idaho Digital Library

homestead patent for 70 acres was finally issued to him in 1911. A postoffice had been established in 1908, with Lowell of course as postmaster.

Lochsa River—This is a Native American name, but may be Flathead instead of Nez Perce.



Lochsa River
Cindy Schacher photograph

Lottie Creek is across the Lochsa from the Lowell place. In 1908, Lottie's mother married Billy Parry, who had come into the country in 1891 and was an early resident of Lowell. Lottie married Elmer Walde, a forest ranger, in 1922 and they moved to Minnesota.

Pete King Ranger Station—Pete King Ranger Station existed from 1908 to 1939 on the site of the present Idaho Transportation Department maintenance station above Lowell. The original log buildings were supplemented by these frame buildings after 1920.



1925—Pete King Ranger Station
K.D. Swan photograph

Pete King Creek—Pete King was born in Germany and prospected all over the American west. The claims on this creek were among the last he worked. From about 1884, he had a homestead near the town of Clearwater, where he died in 1907. Billy Parry spent his last years in an old homestead cabin near the creek. He died there, alone and nearly penniless, in 1941.

Kerr Creek—Across the Lochsa. The Kerr Pole Co. logged poles in this vicinity for several years starting in 1914 and floated them down the river.

Deadman Creek—A human skeleton was found in this drainage about 1908. The human was never identified.

Bimerick Creek was named for Charles Bimerick or his son Henry or maybe both. They were trappers, and Henry was a Forest Service seasonal employee.

Apgar Creek—Bill Apgar was a career Forest Service employee.

Old Man Creek—Named for Old Man Lake, at the head of the drainage. Apparently the Nez Perces called it that, but the reason has never been agreed upon.

Hungry Creek is a major fork of Fish Creek and was named by Captain William Clark in the fall of 1805, when the Lewis-Clark Expedition was short of food. Clark's name for the stream did not persist, but was restored in 1959--complete with his inventive spelling.

Selway River—This name is based on the Nez Perce name Sel-wah or Sel-we. Members of the Selway family, early settlers in the Beaverhead Valley of Montana, have claimed for years that the river was named for them. It wasn't, but the similarity of the names is remarkable.



Selway River
Cindy Schacher photograph

Johnson Creek and Johnson Bar were named after the Ed Johnson family, who in 1912 took over an existing homestead on what is now the lower pasture at Fenn Ranger Station. Johnson patented the place in 1915, but the family moved away in 1920. The Forest Service traded timber for the property in 1937.



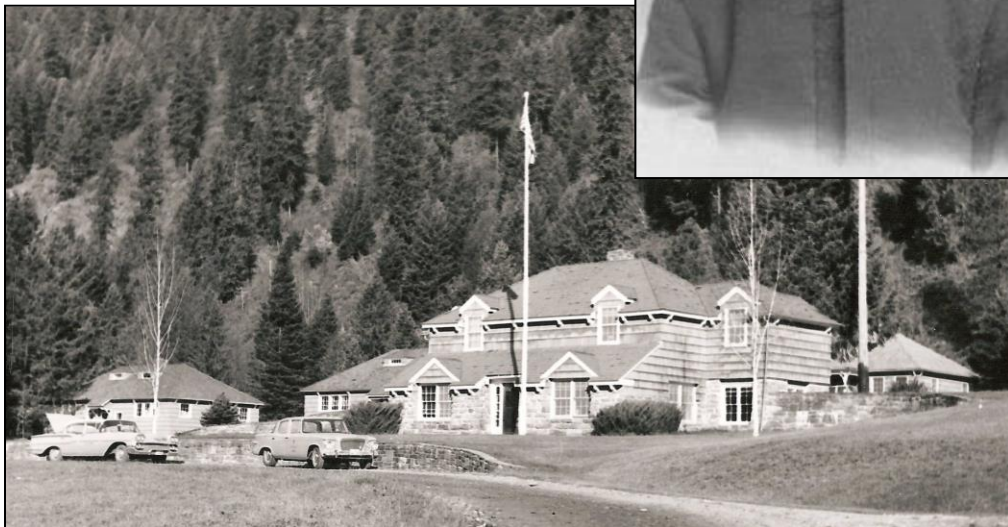
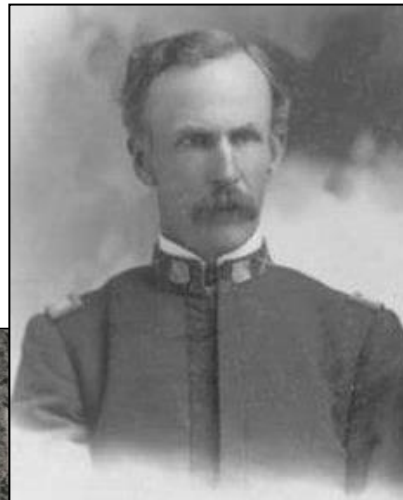
Johnson Family Homestead—
Helen E. Ridley photograph, USFS Collection

Goddard Creek—Across the Selway. Jack Goddard was an early resident who left the country in 1910. The creek is shown on early maps as Cedar Creek.

Fenn Ranger Station was completed in 1940, and replaced the Middle Fork (Number One), Pete King, and O'Hara Ranger Stations. Frank Fenn was the first supervisor of the Clearwater National Forest, which at the time was headquartered in Kooskia and included all of the Lochsa-Selway country. Fenn had an illustrious career before taking up public forest management in 1901: he was a student at the first public school in Idaho, at Florence; was a cadet at the U.S. Naval Academy; was a participant in the Nez Perce Indian War of 1877; was Speaker of the House in the first Idaho Legislature; and was a major in the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War. He retired from the Forest Service Regional Office in 1920 and moved back to Kooskia, where he died in 1927.

Fenn Ranger Station was built between 1936 and 1940 by young men from the Civilian Conservation Corps camp a few miles upriver, working alongside experienced craftsmen.

Major Frank Fenn
USFS Collection



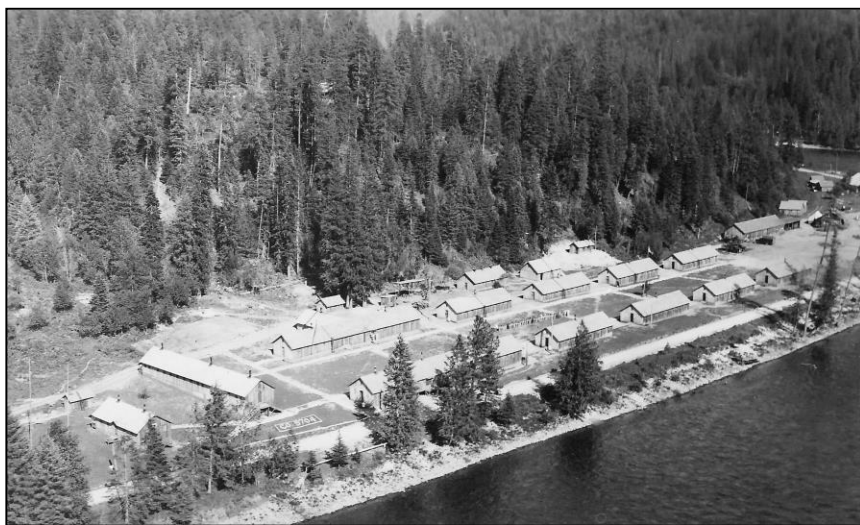
Fenn Ranger Station in 1960. This historic site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.
USFS Collection

O'Hara Creek was named for prospector Pat O'Hara. Not much is known about him except that he was in the country for years and never struck it rich. Hamby Creek, a tributary, was named for Will Hamby, one of the many local homesteaders who worked as Forest Service crewmen from time to time.

O'Hara Ranger Station was located on the river bar opposite the mouth of O'Hara Creek and operated from 1908 until 1939. A year-around, 200-enrollee CCC camp, also called O'Hara, also operated on this bar from 1935 until 1942.



1920—O'Hara Ranger Station
USFS photograph



1938—O'Hara CCC Camp
Robert Grimm photograph
USFS Collection

Rackliff Creek—Sumner Rackliff was the homesteader of record at Syringa and an early Forest Service ranger. He had been injured in a mine accident in Colorado and was somewhat crippled, which didn't slow him down much.

Nineteen Mile Creek, Twenty Mile Creek, Twenty-Three Mile Creek and Twenty-Five Mile Creek all represent trail distances from the Middle Fork Ranger Station (Number One).



Boyd Creek—Jim Boyd had a trapper cabin near the mouth of this creek in the early days. He later lost a leg, and died in 1919 at the Idaho County Poor Farm.

From 1938 until 1951, the State of Idaho operated a fish hatchery on the site. Water temperatures were a constant problem at this hatchery.

1938—Boyd Creek Fish Hatchery
Robert Grimm photograph
USFS Collection.

Glover Creek—Henry C. Glover lived in the Glenwood area out of Kamiah and ran sheep seasonally in the Lochsa-Selway country. Just when he did this isn't certain, but the creek is named on the 1911 Forest Service map. By then, Glover had moved to Oregon.



A Civilian Conservation Corps seasonal camp operated at the mouth of Glover Creek in 1934 and 1935.

1935—Glover Creek CCC Camp
USFS Collection

SOB Creek is across the river from the Selway road. Anyone who has ever been in the bottom of it can testify that the name is appropriate.

Gedney Creek—In 1897 Virgil Gedney, a trapper, fell through the ice on the Selway and drowned.

Selway Falls is a cascade caused by huge boulders rolling into the river from the hillside above. Other huge boulders on the hillside will eventually join those now in the river.



Selway Falls
Cindy Schacher photograph

Selway National Forest

The Bitterroot Forest Reserve was established in 1897. In 1908, the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests were split out from it, and in 1911 the Selway National Forest was split out from the Clearwater. It included almost all of the Lochsa-Selway country, and the supervisor's office was in



1924 Trail Sign
USFS Collection

Kooskia. The Selway National Forest was abolished and dismembered in 1934. These porcelain-on-steel signs weren't used very long. They were weather-resistant, but couldn't take much bending—and they made great targets.

Selway Falls Cabin is the oldest still-existing Forest Service building in the lower Lochsa-Selway country, outlasting many cabins, many more fire



1910—CH Shattuck Collection, University of Idaho Digital Library



Selway Falls Guard Station
Cindy Schacher photograph

lookouts, and three multi-building ranger stations. It was built in 1907 at what is now the Fog Mountain road junction, below the falls. When the Selway road reached there in 1926, the cabin was taken apart log-by-log and reassembled, with a few modifications, on a concrete foundation at its present location above the falls. A back porch was added about 1950.